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*Security in the Nation's
Capital and the Closure of
Pennsylvania Avenue: An
Assessment*

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PREFACE

Acts of terrorism are not a new threat to Washington, D.C. Over the last two centuries, there have been several organized terrorist attacks, as well as numerous assaults by unstable individuals acting alone, that have targeted the White House and U.S. Capitol building and the President or U.S. Congressmen within the city limits of the District of Columbia. It was not, however, until the 1980s that such incidents evoked heightened security around the White House, initiating a process of fortification that culminated with President Clinton's decision in April 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue running in front of the Mansion. While some have criticized the move as a knee-jerk reaction that symbolizes a "bunker mentality" at odds with the perceived strengths of American democracy and freedom, others have vigorously defended the action as a reasonable contingency in the face of a potentially serious and realistic threat.

The research reported here considers both sides of this issue in order to identify how security against terrorist attack in the nation's capital might be assured while at the same time preserving to the greatest extent possible normal traffic patterns and daily life in the city. The study was conducted as part of a project entitled, "Assessment of Physical Security Measures," within RAND's Criminal Justice Research Program. This work is being carried out as part of a larger undertaking by the Federal City Council—a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based organization dedicated to the improvement of the Nation's Capital—aimed at reassessing and reconsidering the physical security measures that have been imposed on the District of Columbia in recent years.

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SUMMARY

For most of the White House's 200 year-old existence, U.S. presidents embraced the Jeffersonian principle of maintaining the Executive Mansion as the "People's House": that is, keeping it as open and accessible to the public as possible. It was not, however, until the 1980s that such incidents evoked heightened security around the White House, initiating a process of fortification that culminated with President Clinton's decision in April 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue running in front of the Executive Mansion. To those involved in the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue, the risks of a truck bomb being detonated outside the White House outweighed the Jeffersonian symbolism of an open Pennsylvania Avenue. But five years on, the truncation of this vital cross-town artery, linking the western and eastern parts of the city, has continued to disrupt traffic and commuting patterns, adversely affected local businesses, and hampered access to the newly revitalized downtown city center. The closure has not only created inconvenience and led to revenue loss, but is also seen to have projected an image of fortification and security that is at once both undesirable and inappropriate given the open and democratic society that is the defining characteristic of our nation.

With this imperative in mind, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan last year called for what he termed a "national conversation" on this issue. This dialogue would discuss how to strike an appropriate balance between the exigencies of executive protection and the need to keep the area surrounding our most venerated federal landmarks and government office buildings accessible, vital and open. In retrospect, this appears to have been precisely one of the main problems with the decision-making process that surrounded the 1995 closure of Pennsylvania Avenue, which went well beyond public statements suggesting the move was driven exclusively to assure the safety of the President and his family from cataclysmic truck bomb attacks. Indeed, during the course of our research, it became apparent that protection of the White House's facade from even minimal or cosmetic damage were as much a factor in the

decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue as ensuring the safety of the president and his family.

Several pressing and inter-related areas need to be addressed in any national conversation regarding the future of Pennsylvania Avenue. First, there needs to be a comprehensive examination of whether an 800 foot setback both from the White House's South Portico to E Street on the north side of the Ellipse and from the front of the White House, across Pennsylvania Avenue, to the northern curb of Lafayette Park on H Street is, in fact, the minimum distance required to sufficiently protect the Executive Mansion.

Second, consideration needs to be given to the various proposals now emerging from designers, architects and transportation engineers exploring the possibilities of key modifications along Pennsylvania Avenue that would open the street to traffic, but still ensure an appropriate level of security. These schemes should not be blindly dismissed for the sake of maintaining complete control over that section of the street or in order to preserve the current status quo simply because any alternative is either too risky or too complicated to contemplate.

Finally, terrorist threat and response environments should not be considered as either static or "zero sum" in nature. Terrorist capabilities improve, but so do those of government, law enforcement and intelligence. Indeed, given the attention, budgets and personnel devoted to counterterrorism since the Oklahoma City bombing, the U.S. is arguably far better prepared to address the threat of terrorism than ever before—and particularly since the 1994/95 time frame when the existing security procedures along Pennsylvania Avenue were put into place. There is no reason to assume that future technological advances will not continue to enhance preventive and preemptive measures. Within this context, it should perhaps be mandated that the security arrangements around the White House and other federal landmarks be reviewed and assessed on some regular basis by a standing advisory commission in addition to whatever internal, inter-governmental process might exist. Such an arrangement would provide a mechanism for validating and substantiating the continuation of existing practices

while ensuring enough flexibility for the introduction of suitable adjustments as and when necessary.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When President Clinton leaves office next January, he will be able to claim credit for having done more than any other president to ensure that America is prepared to counter the threat of terrorism. During his two administrations, overall spending on countering and defending against terrorism doubled. The budgets of key, individual agencies charged with this mission increased exponentially. Three seminal Presidential Decision Directives redefined departmental responsibilities and provided greater coordination of governmental efforts in this area. And, most critically, terrorism was elevated to the very top of the list of security threats that the U.S. will have to face in the 21st Century.

Yet another legacy of the Clinton administration's ambitious counterterrorist efforts, however, is the arguably more controversial presidential decision implemented in May 1995 to close the portion of Pennsylvania Avenue immediately in front of the White House.¹ This unprecedented step was taken at the behest of the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), who had concluded that it would be impossible to protect the White House from a large truck bomb if the street in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue remained open. Only five weeks before a massive truck bomb had exploded outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal office building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 persons and injuring hundreds others. The impact of the estimated 1,200-lb. bomb was sufficient to collapse the north façade of the office building—causing each of its nine floors to crash downward onto one another—and to spread debris across the surrounding ten block area.² The parallels drawn between the Murrah Building blast and the potential for a similar incident in front of the White House were reportedly decisive in the President's decision to accede to the Secret Service's request to bar all traffic traveling on Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets.

¹In addition to the closure of this section of Pennsylvania Avenue to the north of the White House, all west-bound traffic on E Street, to the south of the Executive Mansion, around Ellipse, was also prohibited.

²"Explosion in Oklahoma City," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1995.

Five years on, the truncation of this vital cross-town artery, linking the western and eastern parts of the city, has continued to disrupt traffic and commuting patterns, adversely affected local businesses, and hampered access to the newly revitalized downtown city center. The closure has not only created inconvenience and led to revenue loss, but is also seen to have projected an image of fortification and security that is at once both undesirable and inappropriate given the open and democratic society that is the defining characteristic of our nation.³

In perhaps the most eloquent explication of this view, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan last year called for what he termed a "national conversation." This conversation would discuss how to strike an appropriate balance between the exigencies of executive protection and the need to keep the area surrounding our most venerated federal landmarks and government office buildings accessible, vital and open. "The capital," Senator Moynihan explained,

now swarms with black armored limos filled with agents and protrudent automatic weapons. Pennsylvania Avenue itself, the sector in front of the Treasury, the White House and the Executive Office Building, has been sealed to regular traffic. . . . In the meantime the Capitol as the White House has been surrounded with Jersey barriers, squad cars and armed officers. So also have our office buildings.

We all know the events that have led to this profound change; events at home and abroad. And yet we have simply reacted to events, rather than reflecting on them.⁴

The New York Senator recognized the risk inherent to the conversation he was proposing. "Call for more openness, and the next day there may be a new atrocity," he conceded. But to his mind, this was far outweighed by damage that could be done from stifling debate and smothering discussion in the name of national security. No less than the

³See Benjamin Forgey, "A Capital Under Security's Siege: Sen. Moynihan Calls for 'National Conversation'," *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1999.

⁴Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Resolved: A National Conversation on Terrorism is in Order," Transcript of a speech delivered at GSA Design Award Ceremony, The Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, March 25, 1999.

"reputation of a democratic government," Senator Moynihan averred, is at stake.

A markedly different perspective, however, is offered by Judge William Webster, a past director of both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—and indeed without exception by all the federal law enforcement officials and agents we consulted in the course of this research. As Judge Webster simply and succinctly observed: "Security is always too much until one day is not enough."⁵ This is an issue, moreover, with which Judge Webster is very familiar: he was a member of the advisory commission convened by the Department of the Treasury in 1994 to assess security around the White House that endorsed the Secret Service's recommendation to close Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. Recalling the commission's deliberations, Judge Webster explained that, "Our main concern was the safety of the people inside the building and secondarily of the potent effect of one of the most revered buildings going down because no one had bothered to protect it."⁶ Following exhaustive deliberations and the detail consideration of options, the commission reportedly reluctantly concluded that there was no viable alternative to closure.⁷

Indeed, prominent among the commission's concerns was precisely the threat of a truck bomb exploding in front of the White House and the death and destruction that would be inflicted on the building itself, its occupants, its staff, security detail, and to ordinary passersby and sightseers. The potentially horrendous consequences of even an attack that failed to harm the President or injure anyone else, but nonetheless damaged the building, thus apparently exerted a significant influence over the commission's deliberations.⁸ This same line of reasoning was

⁵Discussion with Judge Webster, June 8, 2000.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid and discussion with William T. Coleman, former Secretary of Transportation and a member of the commission, Washington, D.C., June 2, 2000.

⁸Ibid. This aspect of the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue was similarly emphasized by a retired senior FBI agent responsible for counterterrorism in discussion with a member of the research project staff, May 30, 2000.

echoed in the threat assessment offered by a currently serving, senior FBI official. "What is the national symbol of freedom or the United States absent the American bald eagle or the flag?" he rhetorically asked. "The White House. If terrorists are successful in attacking or bombing the White House, the incident sends that much more of a message."⁹ From his perspective—along with other law enforcement officials charged with defending against terrorist attack in the city—the White House was, and remains, in ineluctably inviting target.

ORGANIZATION AND METHODOLOGY

This report considers both sides of this complex issue—encapsulated by Senator Moynihan as the debate between "precaution" and "sequester."¹⁰ Accordingly, its purpose is to identify how security against terrorist attack in the nation's capital might be assured while at the same time preserving to the greatest extent possible normal traffic patterns and daily life in the city. We focus on how traffic restrictions imposed in the vicinity of the White House complex have impacted on the District of Columbia and explore how these relate to current threat perceptions in the city. Our main objective though is to assess whether there are grounds for reviewing the 1995 decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue and, if so, the extent to which re-opening the street can be achieved without unduly increasing the risk to the President, his family, the White House and the White House staff.

Our research was organized around five key questions. They were:

1. What were the primary factors that influenced the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue in 1995 to vehicular traffic?
2. Having taken the decision to close down Pennsylvania Avenue, was any thought given to assessing how long the Avenue should stay closed (e.g., was the decision regarded as a *permanent* solution)?
3. In looking to the future, have any alternatives recently been examined other than the complete closure of Pennsylvania Avenue?

⁹Discussion at the Washington Field Office, FBI, May 30, 2000.

¹⁰Senator Moynihan, "Resolved: A National Conversation on Terrorism is in Order," March 25, 1999.

4. Broadening the focus from the White House to external physical security in general, have the responses of other major capital cities faced with serious terrorist threats been examined?
5. In terms of threat perception, what is the greatest type of danger posed by terrorists in Washington, DC today?

These research questions were conceived not only to illuminate the disruption, inconvenience and adverse effects that the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue has caused but also to better appreciate the broad challenges faced by federal law enforcement in defending Washington, D.C. against terrorist attack and specifically by the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) in protecting the President and his family within the confines of the Executive Mansion. In this respect, we were also interested to learn how other capital cities that have experienced sustained terrorism threats and serious incidents of violence have coped with this challenge. We thus sought to derive any applicable lessons, technologies and approaches to security and countering terrorism that might be relevant to the District of Columbia from the experiences of cities such as London, Paris, and Colombo (Sri Lanka). Our methodology included a detailed literature search and in-depth interviews of former and serving federal law enforcement officials with particular knowledge and experience of Washington, D.C.-area related security issues, members of the aforementioned commission convened by the Treasury Department in 1994-1995 to assess White House security, and other informed persons involved in this issue. A copy of the survey instrument designed for the project may be found at Appendix I.

One caveat should be noted. At the risk of stating the obvious, we learned in the course of our research that the issue of security and protection against terrorist attack in the nation's capital in general and the White House in particular is a highly sensitive, if not, emotionally-charged subject. While some federal law enforcement agencies were helpfully forthcoming and frank in their depiction and explanations of the problem, other key federal agencies declined the opportunity to discuss these issues with the project research staff. Similarly, the security personnel of some foreign embassies in

Washington were themselves reluctant to meet with us or even to discuss the policies and procedures in force around the official residences and most important landmarks in their own nations' capitals for fear of compromising otherwise good relations with their American counterparts. Our intention therefore in presenting this research is neither to take sides in the debate over Pennsylvania Avenue's continued closure nor to proffer solutions to the "precaution" versus "sequester" debate. Rather, it is to contribute substantively and empirically to—and thereby help stimulate and inform—the "national conversation" that Senator Moynihan so cogently calls for.

The report is organized in six sections in addition to this Introduction. The second section provides an historical overview to security in and around the White House and examines the events leading up to the decision taken in 1995 to close Pennsylvania Avenue. Section three considers the current debate between the "precaution" or "sequester" arguments, identifies law enforcement and security concerns and assesses the potential alternatives to the Avenue's continued closure. Section four focuses on the security measures in force around landmarks and heads-of-state residences in foreign capital cities and considers their relevance to this country. Finally, a concluding section presents recommendations designed to assist and inform the "national conversation" referred to above.

2. THE DECISION TO CLOSE PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE, 1800 TO 2000

Acts of terrorism are not a new threat to Washington, D.C. Over the last two centuries, there have been several organized terrorist attacks, as well as numerous attacks by unstable individuals acting alone, targeted at either the President of the United States or U.S. Congressman within the city limits of the District of Columbia. However, it was not until the 1980s that such attacks first evoked heightened security around the White House and the U.S. Capitol and set in motion a process that has culminated to date in the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue. Significantly, it has been international and domestic terrorist attacks that have occurred outside the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area—and indeed outside even the U.S. as well—which have been the dominant influence on the security measures in force in and around the White House today. This section of the report examines the ever-increasing physical security measures that have been taken to protect the White House Complex throughout its 200 year existence and the various acts of violence and war that have caused the fortification of security at White House Complex and the U.S. Capitol.

SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE: THE FIRST 183 YEARS

For most of the White House's 200 year-old existence,¹¹ U.S. presidents embraced the Jeffersonian principle of maintaining the Executive Mansion as the "People's House": that is, keeping it as open and accessible to the public as possible. Indeed, until as recently as the first part of the twentieth century, presidents and their wives would regularly greet visitors briefly during the lunch hour. President Jefferson himself granted almost unfettered access to the White House, imposing restrictions only early in the morning, while he was asleep, or when he was out of town. Although three presidents fell victim to

¹¹Building of the original White House commenced in 1792. It was first occupied by President and Mrs. John Adams in 1800. The present structure was completely re-built in 1818, following its destruction four years earlier by British troops, during the War of 1812.

assassins during the nineteenth century—Lincoln (1865), Garfield (1881), and Harrison (1885)—of which two occurred in Washington, D.C. (Lincoln and Garfield), access to the White House was only first curtailed during the Spanish-American War.

The public enjoyed even freer rein on the White House grounds. The White House gardens provided an unobstructed view of the Potomac River, and was considered a prime tourist attraction in the early part of the nineteenth century. Admission to the grounds was only regulated by a series of walls and fences that were constructed over a period of time beginning during President Jefferson's tenure in the White House. Eventually guards were employed to manage the flow of visitors to the grounds. It was only during World War II, however, that the public admittance to the White House grounds during day-light hours was finally abolished.

Although access to the White House and its grounds was more liberal in the past, this is not to imply that there was a complete lack of security measures within and around the perimeter of the White House Complex. President Jefferson ordered the construction of a high stone wall to replace the temporary rail-fence that then surrounded the White House grounds. A portion of the northern wall blocked the view of the Executive Mansion from present-day Lafayette Park, leading to President Monroe to replace the stone wall with a curving iron fence. An iron fence was also constructed on the west and east sides of the White House as well. In addition to the iron fences, President Monroe had gates installed with heavy locks.

Accordingly, up until 1835, the iron fence would remain the most visible and only physical structure for security. This changed, however, in January 1835 when a man identified as Richard Lawrence fired two pistols at President Andrew Jackson as the president attended funeral services for Representative Warren R. Davis in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol. Jackson was not harmed as both pistols misfired. Nonetheless, as a result of the assassination attempt, a wooden "watch

box" for a sentry was installed on the south grounds at the gate to the President's garden.¹²

Until the early part of the twentieth century, security for the president consisted mainly of guards in civilian dress, recruited from the marshal of the District of Columbia. During special events or when the public was invited to the White House, the number of guards would increase. In addition to the guards, a doorkeeper was assigned to maintain watch in the entrance hall. While not armed, the doorkeeper always had firearms close at hand. Not all Presidents approved of the guard system. Both Presidents Adams and Jackson were against it, while President Monroe required it. However, it was not until 1842 when—under the Tyler Administration—a permanent company of guards to protect the President and the White House Complex was established. Two events prompted this decision. In 1841, an intoxicated individual entered the White House grounds and threw stones at the President as he walked along the South Grounds. This was probably the closest a President has come to being physically harmed while on White House grounds. In 1842, an enraged and intoxicated Whig mob, protesting President Tyler's veto of a bill to create the Second Bank of the United States, gathered outside the White House's locked gates, throwing stones, firing guns and burning the President in effigy.

Nonetheless, physical security measures remained largely unchanged until World War II, except in times of war. During the Civil War, troops took up positions in the Mansion until the District of Columbia was determined to be sufficiently fortified; however no additional physical barriers were constructed. In 1942, after the United States had officially entered World War II, guardhouses were placed at regular intervals both inside and outside the fence and were manned by a special detachment of Military Police. Also, armed sentries stood watch around the clock on the White House roof; they continued this rooftop surveillance until being assigned elsewhere toward the end of the war.

Whatever physical security measures remained in place after the war were designed mostly to prevent forcible ground intrusions from lone

¹²Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review* (Washington, D.C.; Government Printing Office, 1995).

individuals and/or by assassins. But even the November 1950 attempt on the life of President Truman at the Blair House by Puerto Rican nationalists did not result in increased physical security measures at the White House. It was reasoned that having President Truman reside in the Blair House while renovations were being completed at the White House had in fact actually amplified the security risk to the President. The Blair House offered, by its architectural design and placement, a limited-security environment. It was separated by the sidewalk by five feet of front lawn, a shoulder-high wrought-iron fence, and a low hedge, as opposed to the White House which had over 60 yards of front lawn, a twelve-foot high fence, and numerous sentry posts.¹³ The actual physical threat posed to the president, accordingly, was deemed to have receded when he and his family moved back into the comparatively more secure White House.

Although, as we have seen, there have been some violent incidents on the perimeter of the White House grounds over the past one hundred fifty years, it is only over the last fifty years—and particularly over the last 26 years—that attempts to enter the White House Complex forcibly have occurred both more frequently and have tended to be of a more violent nature. These intrusions have come from the ground, as well as from the air—and, depending on the severity, some have prompted increased physical security measures. In February 1974, Private Robert Preston, a U.S. Army helicopter mechanic, stole a military helicopter from Fort Meade, Maryland and flew it over the Executive Mansion. He then proceeded to hover over the South Lawn of the White House and touched down briefly approximately 150 feet from the West Wing before flying away. Preston returned a short time later, when he was forced to land by the Executive Protection Agency in a hail of shotgun and submachine gunfire.¹⁴

On Christmas Day of the same year, a man named Marshall Fields, dressed in Arab clothing and claiming to be both the Messiah and laden with explosives, crashed his car through the Northwest Gate of the White

¹³Elbert B. Smith, "Shoot-Out on Pennsylvania Avenue," *American History*, May/June 1998, <http://thehistorynet.com>.

¹⁴*The New York Times*, 17 February 1974, p. 1, 6.

House Complex and drove up to the North Portico, several feet from the White House front door. Following a four hour stand-off, he surrendered. The alleged explosives strapped to Fields turned out to be ordinary flares.¹⁵ In both the above instances, President Nixon and the first family were not at home.

Despite Secret Service spokesman George Cosper's comments that White House security measures were adequate, the Secret Service conducted a security review following these two events, and in 1976 the nineteenth century wrought-iron gates were replaced with more formidable, reinforced gates. The same year that the new gates were installed, Stephen B. Williams attempted unsuccessfully to ram through the new Northwest Gate in his pick-up truck. Unlike the truck, the gates did not buckle.

Although these attempts to penetrate the White House grounds or immediate surrounding areas were indeed of the violent nature and may also have had the deliberate intention of causing the President harm, none was considered indicative of a trend to carry out large-scale attacks, i.e. detonating truck bombs, against the White House Complex with the goal of destroying or severely damaging it; nor did trends in international or domestic terrorism at the time support such concerns.¹⁶ Accordingly, closing off Pennsylvania Avenue to prevent such attacks did not emerge as a serious security issue until the early 1980s. The only previous, documented, discussions of closing Pennsylvania Avenue occurred during President Kennedy's tenure in office. The motivation for the closure was purely aesthetic. During the Kennedy administration, architects working on a project to preserve buildings along Lafayette Square offered the President and the First Lady the option of turning the avenue in front of the White House into a pedestrian plaza, with fountains on each end, raised flower beds in the middle and light gray granite as the surface.¹⁷ But the proposal

¹⁵The New York Times, 26 December 1974, p. 1.

¹⁶For an assessment of trends in international and domestic terrorism at that time, see Bruce Hoffman, Congressional Testimony, *The World Trade Center Bombing, The Three Mile Island Intrusion and the Potential Threat to Nuclear Power Plants*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, March 1993, CT-106).

founded following President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963.¹⁸

Until 1983, the security measures that were in place at the White House reflected the types of threats most likely to be encountered at the White House Complex. Over the last two decades, however, a series of incidents both at the White House and outside the District of Columbia, have led to the current closure of the section of Pennsylvania Avenue directly in front of the White House. These incidents have been varying in nature. Some have been international terrorist attacks on American targets overseas, while others have involved direct attacks on the White House or other federal and non-government buildings within the U.S. Most of them have been individual acts of violence, not knowingly tied to larger terrorist movements. Nevertheless, each has resulted the implementation of increasingly strict security measures to protect the physical structures of the White House Complex.

In 1983, in response to a combination of a series of suicide car and truck bombings by Islamic terrorists against American targets in the Middle East, the explosion of a small bomb outside the Senate Chamber in the U.S. Capitol building, and intelligence reports that pro-Iranian terrorists were planning to attack major U.S. installations, the Secret Service began to put into place an antiterrorist plan, which increased security at the White House Complex. Included among these measures were some permanent alterations to the White House grounds. During the Thanksgiving holiday in 1983, the Secret Service reacted to intelligence reports that pro-Iranian Shiite Muslims were planning a major attack against a U.S. installation by placing trucks filled with sand at most gates to the White House Complex, as well as at the State Department.¹⁹ Three trucks were parked at the southwest gate, another truck was placed inside the northwest gate, and two more inside gates off of 17th Street

¹⁷DeNeen L. Brown, "D.C. Anxious about Impact of Pennsylvania Ave. Closing; Officials Ponder Costs to City, Business, Commuters, *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1995, p. A1.

¹⁸John Carl Warnecke, "A Pennsylvania Avenue for the People," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1998, p. C2.

¹⁹Special to the New York Times, "White House Security Explained," *The New York Times*, 29 November 1983, p. A21.

leading to the Old Executive Building. A seventh truck was placed on the east side of the building next to the Treasury. Within two weeks of the sand-filled trucks being placed at the entrances of the White House Complex, the Secret Service replaced three of them with concrete walls, known as Jersey Barriers. The sand-filled concrete barriers were installed at the intersection of State Place and West Executive Avenue, an entrance frequently used by foreign visitors, guests and other dignitaries. A similar, small concrete barrier was erected at a park across from the south side of the White House.²⁰ As an additional precaution against truck bombs, iron bars which rise out of the ground when the gates are shut were also installed.²¹ Original plans did not call for barriers to be placed at the gates on Pennsylvania Avenue; however, the following year masonry piers were placed along the curb on the section of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House.²²

The truck bombings in Beirut of the U.S. Marine barracks in 1983 and the previous assassination attempt on President Reagan in 1981, also prompted the Secret Service to explore the option of closing Pennsylvania Avenue. The Reagan Administration approached Carl Warnecke, a well-known District of Columbia architect, to design plans for alternative uses of Pennsylvania Avenue. As he had proposed twenty years before to President and Mrs. Kennedy, Warnecke's again suggested the creation of a pedestrian plaza in front of the White House alongside the construction of a tunnel under Pennsylvania Avenue for vehicular traffic.²³ Like its predecessor, the scheme once more languished.

In early 1984, the White House further tightened security, implementing security plans that had been under review for almost a year. The increased security was spurred not only by the previous year's terrorist bombings in the Middle East, but also by the shooting of an armed man outside the White House by a Secret Service agent. From

²⁰David Schribman, "Concrete Barriers Installed at White House Gate," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1983, p. A31.

²¹Phil Gailey, "Access to White House Is Impeded By Dump Trucks In Security Move," *The New York Times*, pp. A1& 24.

²²Ibid., p. 31; Stephen C. Fehr, "The Avenue: Architects Envision a Pedestrian Plaza," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1995, p. A1.

²³Brown & Torry, "D.C. Anxious About Impact of Pennsylvania Ave. Closing," May 22, 1995.

this time forward, therefore, guards with bomb-sniffing dogs checked each car entering the White House Complex for explosives. Media and visitor access to the Executive Mansion was now restricted to two gates, where those entering were checked with magnetometers for concealed weapons. Previously, those entering the White House had only to present their credentials or visitors' permits.²⁴

From the time that the Reagan Administration implemented its anti-terrorist security measures in the 1980s to fortify White House security until the mid-1990s, only slight modification had been made to the overall White House Complex security. Additional concrete barriers or masonry piers were placed around the entire White House Complex and advanced electronic sensors were installed around the perimeter; surveillance from the White House rooftop also has increased. Hence, until the most recent changes, no further modifications were deemed necessary.²⁵ The basic security architecture and measures around the Executive Residence thus remained essentially unchanged for the remainder of the 1980s and into early 1990s.

SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE: THE PAST SEVEN YEARS

Even before the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, which prompted the most significant changes in the name of security to the White House and its environs in the nation's history, the Secret Service reportedly had wanted to close the portion of Pennsylvania Avenue immediately in front of the Executive Mansion. Three unrelated incidents that had occurred in the Fall and Winter of 1994, had provided the main, initial arguments in favor of closure.²⁶ The first incident occurred in September, when a 38 year old man, with a history of alcohol and substance abuse, stole a private, light aircraft from a small airport in

²⁴Reuters, "New Security Steps Being Taken At White House After Shooting," *The New York Times*, March 17, 1994, p. A12.

²⁵Stephen C. Fehr, "Architects Envision A Pedestrian Plaza," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1995.

²⁶Discussions with Judge William Webster (June 8, 2000) and William T. Coleman, a former Secretary of Transportation (June 2, 2000). Additional discussions with Gary Burch, former Chief of Engineer for the District of Columbia, and Harvey Joyner, both of Parsons Transportation, May 24, 2000.

Maryland and intentionally crashed it into the White House. Although no one was harmed or injured (except the plane's pilot, who died in what is thought to have been a deliberate act of suicide), the incident served to highlight the building's vulnerability to a determined—and, as in this case, a suicidal—adversary. The following month, a lone gunman opened fire on the White House with a semi-automatic assault rifle. Some 29 rounds peppered the north façade of the White House, with one bullet penetrating a window in the Press Briefing Room located in the West Wing. Then, in December, the mansion was struck by bullets fired from somewhere south of the White House grounds.²⁷

Although none of the incidents appear to have been politically-motivated, and therefore cannot be construed as an act of terrorism per se,²⁸ and while neither inflicted any serious harm or damage to other persons or the White House, they nonetheless fed a growing climate of fear and concern over terrorism in the U.S. that had been triggered by the previous year's bombing of New York City's World Trade Center. That attack, which had occurred within weeks of President Clinton's inauguration, sent shock-waves throughout the country. A large bomb, weighing approximately 1,200-lbs. had been constructed from readily available commercial ingredients (in this instance, urea and nitric acid—whose explosive power was in turn further enhanced by three metal cylinders of compressed hydrogen gas),²⁹ killed six persons and injured over a thousand others. The casualty toll doubtless would have been far greater had the terrorists responsible for the blast succeeded in their intention of toppling one of the twin towers onto the other.

The significance of the Trade Center blast, and its impact on the American psyche, cannot be understated. Until then, terrorism had been widely perceived by Americans as something that happened elsewhere. Accordingly, however frequently U.S. citizens and interests were the target of terrorists abroad, many Americans nonetheless believed that

²⁷For additional details of these incidents, see Appendix II.

²⁸Terrorism here is defined by its most salient characteristic as a politically-motivated act of violence.

²⁹Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Laden and the future of terrorism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7, & 154

the United States itself was somehow immune to such violence within its own borders. The Trade Center bombing, however, shattered that facade of complacency and began to influence thinking about the security of a broad range of potential targets across the U.S.—and in Washington, D.C. in particular—as no previous terrorist incident had. Indeed, despite a somewhat malignant domestic history of attacks on American presidents—one in four have been the target of assassination³⁰—it was only in the aftermath of this incident, with the additional impetus provided by both the aforementioned aircraft crash and the two shootings, that the extraordinary security measures in force around the White House today began to take shape.

As a result of all these incidents, a commission was therefore established to review the security needs at the White House Complex and advise the Treasury Department on a variety of issues—including whether Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets should be closed. The commission, comprised of experts from outside the government, was directed by former Treasury Secretary Benston³¹ to examine and evaluate all aspects of the facts surrounding the aircraft crash in September 1994; the security procedures in and around the White House Complex then in force; the White House Complex's vulnerability to air and ground attacks; and, the utilization of state-of-the-art technologies to enhance protection from such assaults. It was also charged with finding a means with which to balance the "need to keep the White House as open and accessible to the public as possible consistent with valid security needs"—specifically in terms of closing or maintaining vehicular access to Pennsylvania Avenue.³²

³⁰According to Franklin L. Ford's seminal work, *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), nine presidents have been the victims of attack by assassins (one of them twice), as well as one president-elect and three presidential candidates." See p. 355.

³¹Both the then-Undersecretary of the Treasury for Enforcement, Ronald K. Noble, and then-Secret Service (USSS) Director, Eljay B. Bowman, however, appear to have been the key Treasury Department players on the commission.

³²U.S. Treasury Department Memorandum, "Department of Treasury's White House Review," May 1, 1995.

After eight months of study, the commission recommended that the section of Pennsylvania Avenue that ran directly in front of the White House be closed to all vehicular traffic and made into a pedestrian zone. The recommendation of the panel, after consultations with the White House Administration, was then approved by Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and put into effect on May 19, 1995.³³ The initial steps taken to implement this decision were the placement of barriers on the northwest and northeast intersections of Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th and 17th Streets. These barriers would eventually be replaced with guardhouses, automatic, underground metal barriers, which could be raised and lowered, and large concrete planters.

Initially, the White House rejected the commission's findings, fearing they would send an undesirable symbolic message of closure of government and separation of the president from the people. This assessment changed, however, following the aforementioned April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City. Not only did this incident illustrate, in the most graphic of terms, the awesome destructive power and carnage that could be unleashed by a truck bomb, but more importantly, it apparently re-focused President Clinton's attention on Secret Service assessments that the only way to protect the White House from an attack of this kind was to eliminate all vehicular traffic from in front of the Executive Mansion.³⁴ Had the Oklahoma City bombing not occurred, it is not clear whether President Clinton would in fact have ultimately acceded to the recommendation to close Pennsylvania Avenue, a decision which abruptly came into effect on Saturday, May 20, 1995.³⁵

³³Treasury Order 110-09, May 19, 1995.

³⁴Stephen Labaton, "Security Plan: Close Pennsylvania Avenue," *The New York Times*, May 10, 1995, p. A10.

³⁵Treasury Order 110-09, May 19, 1995. The decision was communicated to the District of Columbia government only the previous evening. Moreover, in addition to closing Pennsylvania Avenue, it was decided that all west bound traffic on E Street and Madison Place to the east of Lafayette Park should be similarly eliminated. Discussion with a former senior official in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. Similar views were also expressed by currently serving FBI officials. Discussion, Washington, D.C., June 2000. See also, Stephen C. Fehr, & Alice Reid, "No Avenue for

Escape, U.S. Agrees Pennsylvania's close is Damaging Downtown," *The Washington Post*, June 7, 1996; and Jackson-Han, "Security Fears Force Closure of Pennsylvania Avenue Near White House," May 20, 1995.

3. "PRECAUTION" OR "SEQUESTER": THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST
PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE'S CONTINUED CLOSURE

The decision taken in 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House apparently was regarded as permanent. From discussions and interviews with two members of the commission convened to advise the Treasury Department to examine White House security, former and currently serving federal law enforcement officers, and the recollection of the former Chief Engineer for District of Columbia, no consideration seems to have been given to establishing a process by which the decision subsequently could be reviewed and reassessed in light of either new developments—whether pertaining to changing terrorism trends or the advent of new technologies or more sophisticated countermeasures—or on some regularly established, periodic basis.³⁶ Nonetheless, five years later intense concern and debate is still easily kindled by this issue and strong opposition remains to its passive acceptance as a *fait accompli*.³⁷

In his aforementioned speech before the GSA Design Awards Ceremony in March 1999, Senator Moynihan thus struck a responsive chord when he forcefully argued that U.S. federal architecture should reflect the political values of its particular age, specifically: "openness and fearlessness in the face of those who hide in the darkness."³⁸ The speech, as such, directly called into question the prevailing rationale governing the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue and, moreover, has served to stimulate renewed discussion of this—that, in turn, has attracted the attention of at least one presidential candidate, Governor George W. Bush,³⁹ and reportedly also peaked the interest of his rival, Vice President Al Gore.

³⁶Interviews and discussions carried out by the project research staff during May and June 2000.

³⁷See, for example, Forgey, "A Capital Under Security's Siege," April 17, 1999.

³⁸Senator Moynihan, "Resolved: A National Conversation on Terrorism is in Order," March 25, 1999.

³⁹"Capital Comment: Bush Driving for Cabbie Vote," *Washingtonian Magazine*, April 2000, p. 11

ARGUMENTS AGAINST CONTINUED CLOSURE—AN OVERVIEW

Several other factors, however, appear to have also encouraged the need for a reassessment of the 1995 decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue. First, sealing-off the roadway between 15th and 17th Streets has proven relatively costly both to the District of Columbia government and to local businesses. Direct economic losses to the city, resulting from reduced parking meter and ticket revenue, as well as higher Metrobus capital expenses due to the forced re-routing of scheduled services, for example, has been estimated at \$460,628 a year.⁴⁰ Since 1995, parking meter losses alone have totaled over \$728,000 (see Table 1), with modifications to the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) network necessitated by the closure costing the District of Columbia an additional \$1,575,000.⁴¹

The indirect costs are more difficult to calculate—especially in terms of lost time, wear and tear on both vehicles and the more heavily trafficked roadways themselves, and the cumulative quality of life effects on individual commuters in terms of generalized inconvenience, lengthened transit times, increased personal stress, etc. However, what can be more readily perceived is that closing Pennsylvania Avenue has negatively impacted business efficiency in the downtown area by increasing traffic volumes and congestion at key intersections (see the discussion below). For certain firms this has meant higher overhead costs in terms of delivery and consignment charges, while for others it has led to a decline in productivity because of longer employee commuting times. Somewhat more seriously, the street's closure has compromised two principal and long-standing reasons for conducting business in the District: proximity and convenience. According to the Greater Washington Board of Trade (GWBT) and the District of Columbia

⁴⁰Labaton, "Security Plan: Close Pennsylvania Avenue," May 10, 1997.

⁴¹U.S. Department of Transportation, *Analysis of Transportation Conditions After Traffic Restriction and Street Modifications in the Vicinity of the White House*, p. 38; U.S. Park Service, *The White House and President's Park: Comprehensive Design Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*; U.S. Department of Transportation, *Analysis of Transportation Conditions After Traffic Restriction and Street Modifications in the Vicinity of the White House*.

Building Industry Association (DCBIA), this has encouraged—if not, forced—several firms to relocate from the inner downtown area, thus also lowering retail sales and property tax values, which has further impacted on the District's overall revenue base.⁴²

Table 1.

PROJECTED COSTS TO THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AS A RESULT OF LOST PARKING METER REVENUE ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE SINCE 1995⁴³

Parking Meter Revenue		Annual Revenue Generated per Meter	Annual Revenue Lost	Revenue Lost Since May 1995
Parking Spaces Lost	49	\$2000	\$98,000	\$490,000
Parking Tickets per Space per month	3	\$972*	\$47,628	\$238,140
Total			\$145,628	\$728,140

* Assumes 36 tickets per space per year at \$27 a ticket

A 1997 survey of 15 firms—including eight service and seven retail businesses—located in the immediate vicinity White House, between 17th and 18th Streets, provides an illustration of at least some of the indirect business costs incurred as a result of the traffic restrictions imposed in 1995. Half of the companies interviewed claimed to have been negatively affected by Pennsylvania Avenue's closure and the re-routing

⁴²See, for instance, Stephen C. Fehr, & Maryann, Haggerty, "Barricades a Blow to Business. Downtown Pinched By Routing, Less Parking After Pennsylvania Ave. Closing," *The Washington Post*, May 28, 1995; Stephen C. Fehr, "Report on Pennsylvania Avenue Closing Hits a Dead End," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1997; and Rudolph A. Pyatt, Jr., "On Pennsylvania Avenue, the Options Are Hardly a Choice," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1996.

⁴³Sources: U.S. Park Service, *The White House and President's Park: Comprehensive Design Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*; U.S. Department of Transportation, *Analysis of Transportation Conditions After Traffic Restriction and Street Modifications in the Vicinity of the White House* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, September 1999).

of traffic, reporting a decreased customer base that varied from between ten and fifty percent per business. When the average number of transactions and patrons were compared to previous years, the decline in total business was identified at about 25 percent. Company general managers cited three main reasons for the drop in commercial activity—each of which is the direct result of closing Pennsylvania Avenue::

1. Reduced accessibility;
2. Restrictions imposed on parking; and,
3. Increased traffic congestion.⁴⁴

More clearly demonstrable is the inconvenience caused by the altered traffic patterns necessitated by the closure. The forced displacement of a significant number of vehicles from Pennsylvania Avenue onto contiguous streets has created severe bottleneck and congestion problems throughout the downtown area. Between 27,000 and 28,000 cars a day, for instance, are known to have traveled along the two blocks in front of the White House prior to April 1995; the majority of which are now forced to use Constitution Avenue and H, I and K Streets.⁴⁵ Respective traffic volumes on these routes have since increased by between 30 and 50 percent, which has severely impacted—and adversely affected—the east-west flow of traffic in the District.⁴⁶ Additional, anecdotal evidence from office workers, shoppers, commuters and taxi cab drivers, suggests that the trip across downtown has

⁴⁴U.S. Department of Transportation, *Analysis of Transportation Conditions After Traffic Restriction and Street Modifications in the Vicinity of the White House*, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁵H and I are relatively narrow streets, whose respective conversion to one-way venues in 1995 have had less of an ameliorative impact on traffic congestion than had been either anticipated or hoped by at least some members of the advisory commission. Discussion with Parsons Transportation, Washington D.C., 24 May 2000; and, with William T. Coleman, Washington, D.C., June 2, 2000; and Judge Webster, Washington, D.C., June 8, 2000.

⁴⁶Discussion with Parsons Transportation, Washington D.C., 24 May 2000.

lengthened by at least 15 minutes and, depending on the time of day, by possibly as much as 45 minutes.⁴⁷

Further, many observers have commented on the negative symbolic effect and undesirable image that closing down the two blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue has projected both within and outside the country. These critics argue that the 1995 decision reflects a "bunker mentality" which is completely at odds with the perception of the thoroughly open society that is widely heralded as the hallmark of American democracy. The street's closure also deprives the area around the Executive Mansion of the freedom of access that underscored President Jefferson's own vision of the White House. Others have pointed out that blocking the roadway serves also to physically separate the District's older central business district west of the Executive Mansion from the concentration of new offices, luxury residences, restaurants and nightspots built east of the White House beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. This is seen as adding a dysfunctional quality to a city that is meant to represent and symbolize the continuity and integration that is inherent in American society. Some have also viewed the closure as emblematic of the growing disconnection between branches of the federal government and between the federal government and District of Columbia city government in that the Treasury Department unilaterally closed Pennsylvania Avenue with neither the advice nor consent of Congress nor of the city government and people of the District of Columbia.⁴⁸

Moreover, pertinent questions have been raised over the extent to which the White House actually represents a vulnerable target. As noted above, the stated rationale for the original decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue was the need to protect the President and the Executive Mansion from the type of cataclysmic truck bomb that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City. However, several

⁴⁷Fehr, "Report on Pennsylvania Avenue Closing Hits a Dead End," June 3, 1997.

⁴⁸Forgey, "A Capital Under Security's Siege. Sen. Moynihan Calls for 'National Conversation'," April 17, 1999; Roger Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1997; Fehr & Haggerty, "Barricades a Blow to Business. Downtown Pinched By Routing, Less Parking After Pennsylvania Ave. Closing," May 28, 1995.

commentators have argued that, in many ways, the White House offers rather good natural protection from a vehicular explosive attack. A number of arguments have been marshaled in this regard:

- The stand-off area between the Executive Mansion and its northern perimeter more than meets the minimum security standard—30 meters (100 feet)—that is applied to U.S. embassies overseas because of fears of vehicular-borne explosive attacks. The White House is in fact set back some 350 feet from Pennsylvania Avenue which, according to several independent analyses, is sufficient to offset the effects of a major explosive force, arguably including even that of a large truck bomb.⁴⁹
- The White House is built on only three levels. This minimizes the danger of successive floor collapse, which was deemed to have been a critical factor in accounting for the excessively high casualty rate in Oklahoma City.⁵⁰
- The White House has a low set, "box-type" geometrical configuration and is built around a framed steel structure that has positive ductile qualities. Both of these characteristics should help to ensure that if any explosive damage does occur to the mansion, it will be localized as opposed to catastrophic.⁵¹

⁴⁹See for instance, C.L. Elliot, "The Defense of Buildings Against Terrorism and Disorder. A Design Philosophy for the Construction of Ordinary Buildings and Installations to Resist Terrorism and Public Disorder," University of Southampton (England): Unpublished M.Phil. thesis, 1986, p. 402; National Research Council (NRC), *The Embassy of the Future. Recommendations for the Design of Future US Embassy Buildings* (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986), p. 31. See also, John J. Strauchs, "Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives concerning the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in the vicinity of the White House for security reasons," June 7, 1996.

⁵⁰See, National Research Council (NRC), *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage* (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1985), p. 21; Associated Press, "Architect Sees His Work Turn to Rubble," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1995.

⁵¹National Research Council, *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage*, p. 56; Elliot, "The Defense of Buildings Against Terrorism and

Various design firms, structural engineers and security contractors have argued these features give the White House a high degree of natural resilience to vehicular terrorist bombings. In addition, they could be easily enhanced and further strengthened through structural reinforcement and retrofit.⁵² Modifications that have been typically highlighted include:

- the addition of mass and redundancy
- the strengthening of support and street facing walls
- the replacement of windows with galvanized shatter-proof glazing, and
- the incorporation of "blow out" panels and sacrificial elements designed to relieve and/or reduce blast pressure and amplification.⁵³

A number of commentators have also asserted that an external laminated, high-tech explosion-resistant plexi-glass fence could be used to effectively deflect the shock wave from a truck bomb away from the White House, pointing out that such an idea was in fact proposed in 1996 by the Director of the Secret Service.⁵⁴

Finally, concern has been expressed over the utility of closing down Pennsylvania Avenue in terms of overall security both as it specifically effects the President and as it potentially impacts on other government buildings and landmarks in the city. Three sets of differing arguments have been emphasized in this regard:

Disorder," p. 505; Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997.

⁵²Discussion with the Parsons Transportation Corporation and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) Architects, Washington D.C., May 24 and May 30, 2000. See also, Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997.

⁵³For further details of these various structural innovations see NRC, *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage*, pp. 54-57.

⁵⁴Discussion with Parsons Corporation, Washington D.C., May 24, 2000. See also, Arthur Cotton Moore, "Letters to the editor - Americas Avenue," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 1996.

1. Preventing vehicular traffic from traveling in front of the White House does not obviate the threat to the President from either non-explosive threats, such as stand-off, remote-control mortar attacks and other types of assassination attempts, or from airborne bomb assaults carried out with micro light/ultra light planes against the White House grounds.⁵⁵
2. Closing Pennsylvania Avenue represents a fixed and visible level of protection. It has been suggested by one foreign security expert, with experience of executive protection elsewhere, that less static and more discrete measures may be preferable in terms of threat mitigation.⁵⁶
3. It has been intimated that the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue ignores one of the cardinal principles of security planning—uniform application. Because similar measures are not enacted at other high-profile buildings, a fear exists that threats to federal and government buildings elsewhere in the District may now have become disproportionately greater.⁵⁷

While none of the arguments presented here can be regarded in and of themselves as providing irrefutable evidence for reassessing the 1995 decision, they nonetheless collectively raise compelling issues that persuasively merit further consideration and discussion.

⁵⁵Moore, "Letters to the editor - Americas Avenue," July 13, 1996; and, Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997.

⁵⁶Rohan Gunaratna, "Impact of Access Control on Protective Security: Closure of Pennsylvania Avenue for Vehicular Traffic," St. Andrews, Scotland: Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, unpublished study, May 2000, p. 2.

⁵⁷Strauchs, "Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives concerning the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in the vicinity of the White House for security reasons," June 7, 1996, p. 3. See also, Stephen C. Fehr, "D.C. Says No to Federal Parking Bans. Officials Respond to Residents' fears They're Slowly Being Cut Off From Their Own City," *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1995.

OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES TO CLOSING PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE: A SYNOPSIS

Above all else, however, any argument in favor of reopening Pennsylvania Avenue—or at the very least, re-opening discussion of the decision—begs the question of how this can be done while still ensuring the President, his family, and the White House staff with as much security as a democracy can provide while remaining true to our country's long-standing commitment to openness. In this respect, a number of options or alternatives have been proposed or are currently being examined that would address simultaneously the security and openness issues—"precaution versus sequester" in Senator Moynihan's formulation—and would also mitigate the disruption and inconvenience that the closure has engendered, but nonetheless still ensure for the security of the President, the first family and White House personnel in addition to the Executive Mansion complex itself. The emergence and continued development of alternatives that might not have been apparent or even possible five years ago, also provides compelling justification for such a reassessment.

One option, for instance, proposes the construction of a short tunnel beneath Pennsylvania Avenue in tandem with the longer tunnel south of the White House, between the Ellipse on E Street, that would maintain cross-town traffic flow—and still allow for the maintenance of an enhanced security regime around the Executive Residence. Alternative ideas to reconstruct Pennsylvania Avenue with a depressed slot configured in such a way that any blast from a truck bomb would be deflected upwards, away from the White House and other surrounding buildings, have also been suggested.⁵⁸ Neither, however, has received particularly favorable consideration: largely due to concerns stemming from cost, aesthetic appeal, disruption and perceived effectiveness.⁵⁹ They are also at odds with plans to expand underground office space and

⁵⁸Stephen C. Fehr, "Architects Envision A Pedestrian Plaza," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1995; Moore, "Letters to the editor - Americas Avenue," July 13, 1996; John Carl Warnecke, "A Pennsylvania Avenue for the People," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1998, p. C2.

⁵⁹Discussion with Parsons Transportation Corporation, Washington D.C., May 24, 2000. Similar comments were expressed to the authors during a telephone interview conducted with William T. Coleman, Washington, D.C. June 2, 2000.

parking beneath the White House West Wing, beneath Pennsylvania Avenue and towards the New Executive Office Building across the street.⁶⁰

Instead, attention has focused on the construction of some form of barrier system that would allow access to Pennsylvania Avenue for cars and SUVs (sport utility vehicles) but prevent the entry of larger trucks and vans. Three potential concepts are of relevance. The first envisages setting up east-west control points, where traffic would be checked and channeled through single entry/exit lanes. This scheme would also incorporate a so-called "Jeffersonian bow" that would curve the mid-section of Pennsylvania Avenue northwards, adding a further 35 to 40 feet of stand-off distance in front of the White House. While this scheme would necessitate the least modification to the existing layout of Pennsylvania Avenue and Lafayette Park, it would inevitably create vehicular bottlenecks at the 15th and 17th Street intersections, doing little to alleviate current traffic congestion in the downtown area. A critical element of this scheme would also be whether the control barriers could be sufficiently strengthened in order to prevent a determined suicide run with an explosive laden truck.⁶¹

The second idea is to "bound" the section of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House with a pair fixed barriers, based on either a twin pedestrian bridge or grand arch design, which would be constructed to ensure that height restrictions would prevent access to trucks and large vans. This proposal would maintain a largely unhindered traffic flow of at least two lanes running in each direction in addition to representing a formidable barrier of ingress and egress. However, the scheme is complex in engineering terms, would have to satisfy numerous environmental and aesthetic benchmarks and would also need to reconcile the problem of how to keep out trucks while allowing the necessary entry of emergency vehicles.⁶²

⁶⁰See U.S. Park Service. *The White House and President's Park: Comprehensive Design Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, September 1999).

⁶¹Discussion with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Washington D.C., 30 May 2000.

⁶²*Ibid.*

The third proposal combines a limited control gateway system at either end of Pennsylvania with an automated pole-barrier/crossbeam mechanism that could be lowered to prevent trucks and large vans from entering the roadway but raised to accommodate the through-passage of emergency vehicles. This option would do away with the bottleneck and perceived deterrence problems of the first alternative, while being far more flexible as well as less costly and complex than the fixed bridge concept of option.⁶³

The merits of all the above alternatives are palpable; what is now required is further discussion, debate and assessment of their practicality and viability. This can only occur in an environment that both facilitates and encourages the "national conversation" advocated by Senator Moynihan. At present, that environment lamentably does not exist. Moreover, it is one that has not necessarily found favor with those responsible for security in the nation's capital.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR CONTINUED CLOSURE—AN OVERVIEW

Both the former and currently serving federal law enforcement officials with whom we spoke strongly oppose the re-opening of Pennsylvania Avenue.⁶⁴ To their minds, it is neither necessary nor judicious to even consider reversing this decision. In addition, serious doubts were expressed about the effectiveness of any compensatory barrier systems, such as the ones proposed above.

Typical of their dismissal of any discussion about re-opening the street in front of the White House to traffic was the observation that, most people who live and work in the District have become largely inured to the road's closure, seeing congestion in the downtown area as just one more inconvenience in a city that is already beset by a myriad of intractable traffic problems. Moreover, these officials argue that the public mindset in and around the District of Columbia, given its status as the nation's capital, is far more security-conscious and sensitive

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Interviews and discussions conducted by the RAND project research staff with retired and currently serving FBI agents responsible for counterterrorism either at the national level or for Washington, D.C. specifically, Washington, D.C. May and June 2000.

than that of any other major American metropolis and that therefore contingencies such as important road closures and obtrusive physical security are largely accepted as entirely reasonable and necessary precautionary measures. It was additionally pointed out that due to the inherently transient nature of employment among many of the city's government workers—be they political appointees or individuals serving a designated tour of duty with a governmental agency or at a military base in the District of Columbia—there are doubtless a large number of people who have never known Pennsylvania Avenue as anything but closed. Accordingly, for this section of the population, re-opening the street was described as essentially a "non-issue."⁶⁵

The federal law enforcement personnel with whom we spoke also rejected claims concerning the negative economic impact of closing Pennsylvania Avenue. They argued that because more people are now out on foot in the immediate vicinity of the White House, businesses (at least to their knowledge) are benefiting from an increased volume in pedestrian trade. In the same vein, these officials deny that altered traffic patterns in front of the White House have served to reduce public access to the Executive Mansion, arguing that this historic landmark remains one of the most open, frequently visited and freely roamed executive residences in the world. In the words of one FBI agent, all that closing Pennsylvania Avenue has done "is to put a barrier between the people's cars and their President. This is not about access, but about [commuters'] convenience."⁶⁶

Most of their apprehensions and concerns, however, relate to physical security issues and the perceived impact that re-opening Pennsylvania Avenue would have for the safety of the President and security of the White House. Two specific concerns were repeatedly emphasized:

⁶⁵Discussion with FBI officials, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C., May 30, 2000.

⁶⁶Ibid.

- The structural integrity of the Executive Mansion and the detrimental effects of an attack that inflicted any visible damage whatsoever on so important a national symbol; and,
- That any decision to re-open Pennsylvania Avenue would be tantamount to "waving a red flag" in front of the terrorists, in that it would inevitably constitute a provocative act that would likely prompt or invite terrorist attack.

With regard to the first issue, the former and currently serving FBI officials with whom we spoke and, from what we could gather either from published discussions of, and anecdotally from persons familiar with, the Secret Service's position,⁶⁷ the claim that the White House offers a high degree of natural protection to a truck bomb is widely—and vehemently—disputed. The standard setback distance required for American embassies of 30 meters is seen as largely irrelevant to the White House because the Executive Mansion is not reinforced to nearly the same degree as these more modern, often retrofitted and significantly strengthened, overseas diplomatic missions are. For example, since the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa, many of the American legations are now protected by extremely strong and resilient blast walls. Security analysts, however, maintain that the over pressure and "shock velocity" generated from 1,200-1,800 pounds of homemade explosive,⁶⁸ a perfectly feasible payload that could be concealed in a standard truck or semi-trailer, would be sufficient to collapse the White House completely: so long as the force of the blast was appropriately channeled and directed.⁶⁹ According to Secret Service

⁶⁷Despite repeated efforts, officials at both the Treasury Department and Secret Service declined, or proved unable, to meet with the RAND research staff.

⁶⁸Home made explosives are seen as representing a greater danger than Semtex or high explosive (HE) for several reasons including; the relative ease of component acquisition, lower cost and greater explosive effectiveness resulting from the crushing/mushrooming (as opposed to the sharp, cutting) shock wave that it generates.

⁶⁹Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. See also, John W. Ellis, *Police Tactics and Planning for Vehicular Bombing: Prevention, Defense and Response* (Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, Ltd, 1999), Chapter 5.

blast simulations and modeling, a standoff distance of at least 800 feet therefore is required to adequately protect the building from this type of explosive force.⁷⁰ It is perhaps not coincidental that this figure equates exactly to the distance from the front of the White House to the southern curb of H Street/northern boundary of Lafayette Park and from the White House South Portico to the South Street Ellipse: even though the requirement of an 800-ft. setback has never been publicly discussed or otherwise used to justify the 1995 closing of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The prospect that the White House could be further strengthened through structural reinforcement and retrofit is similarly dismissed. Proposals to surround the Executive Mansion with a plexi-glass shield were rejected on the grounds that it would not be sufficiently strong to withstand the effects of a major explosive force and would itself become a dangerous anti-personnel weapon in the form of shards of sharpened plastic being turned into deadly pieces of shrapnel. While blast barriers of the sort employed outside U.S. embassies could be used, these would have to be built so high in order to ensure that explosive shock waves would "roll" over the White House. They would thereby necessarily obscure the building and detract completely from the White House's symbolic function and purpose and thus negate precisely the openness and accessibility that the re-opening of Pennsylvania Avenue is intended to achieve.

Some of the law enforcement officers with whom we spoke additionally pointed out that a shield or blast wall of this type would doubly compound the explosive impact of any bomb attack on the surrounding neighborhood. Contiguous buildings would not only be hit with the positive force from the primary explosion; they would also be struck by secondary shock waves deflected back from the blast wall. This would result in considerable loss of life among any passersby or

⁷⁰Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. The Department of Defense has gauged the effects of a 2000 lb blast for a framed house blast. Their analysis shows that even this amount of explosive would cause total destruction at a distance of 200 feet, dropping to 50 percent damage from 275 feet and between 50 percent and 0 percent damage up to 650 feet. Telephone interview with e-mail follow ups with Tom Convery, police explosives expert, Ventura County, June 6, 2000.

sightseers unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity of the White House were such an explosion to occur. The shock waves would almost certainly also demolish Blair House and many of the other historic buildings lining Madison and Jackson Places as well as the Secret Service and Park Service Police command posts situated on the street. The terrorists responsible for the incident, these officials argue, accordingly would enjoy the added benefit of a "picture perfect" backdrop for the inevitable television camera shots of the White House surrounded by untold death and destruction.⁷¹

While some concession was made that hardening of the White House's internal structure could conceivably protect the building from the most destructive effects of a major truck bomb, these officials pointed out that this should not be seen as an all-inclusive end in itself. Indeed, given the Executive Mansion's symbolism, as representing the heart of American government and democracy, federal security priorities have already become as much concerned with preventing any damage to the building's façade as ensuring against wholesale collapse. In other words, any physical damage whatsoever inflicted on the building—regardless of whether anyone is harmed or not—has come to be regarded as completely unacceptable. Ensuring that this does not occur has hence become an objective that can only be achieved by eliminating entirely the threat of a vehicular bomb in the vicinity of the White House: which apparently means maintaining the 800-ft. setbacks from the front of the White House to the southern curb of H Street and from the South Portico to E Street as well as keeping Pennsylvania Avenue permanently devoid of all vehicular traffic.⁷² In this vein, the FBI officials with whom we met, argued that Pennsylvania Avenue should be grassed over completely and permanently converted into a pedestrian thoroughfare as people would then no longer identify the route as a roadway and cease questioning whether or not it should be re-opened.⁷³

⁷¹Discussion with FBI agents, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000.

⁷²Discussion with Parsons Corporation, Washington D.C., May 24, 2000.

⁷³Discussion with FBI field officers, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000.

Over and above questions relating to structural integrity, serious concerns remained that any move to relax existing physical security restrictions around Pennsylvania Avenue will serve as a "red flag" to terrorists, inviting—if not, prompting—an attack against a reconstituted "soft target of opportunity." Because the White House represents such an attractive target in terms of American symbolism, rolling back security measures after a vulnerability has already been identified is simply not regarded as a viable option by these officials: especially at a time when the perceived threat of terrorism is seen to be increasing.⁷⁴ These law enforcement officials argue that events such as the 1996 Khobar barracks bombing in Saudi Arabia and the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania two years later,⁷⁵ clearly demonstrate that neither the World Trade Center nor the Oklahoma City blasts were aberrations or isolated events, but profound harbingers of the future. In this respect, these incidents—all of which, it should be noted, occurred outside of Washington, D.C. and indeed in some cases, outside the U.S. itself—underscore the omnipresent threat to the White House. As one former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism somberly concluded, "Most people who are expert on physical security will agree that there is no way to open up Pennsylvania Avenue . . . without the risk going up."⁷⁶

Further fueling these security concerns is a firm conviction on the part of the officials we spoke with that the type of compensatory barrier control measures—which present the most viable alternative to complete closure—are themselves insufficient to offset the danger of a

⁷⁴See, for example, the recently released report of the National Commission on Terrorism, *Countering The Changing Threat* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Terrorism, June 2000), p. iv and passim.

⁷⁵The Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia killed 19 US military personnel, injuring more than 500 (American and Saudi) others. The Kenyan and Tanzanian bombings collectively killed 257, wounding in excess of 5,000.

⁷⁶Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. Serving FBI officers make largely the same point. They maintain that although both Bush and Gore have talked about the need for a "national conversation" over Pennsylvania Avenue, once either takes up residence in the White House, the issue will likely be dropped as the question of security will suddenly take on a real and personal relevance.

vehicular bomb being detonated in front of the White House. These law individuals seriously question the ability of automated/flexible pole systems to deter a determined suicide attack involving a fanatically determined terrorist driving a large van or truck. They point out that effectively halting a speeding vehicle with a barrier of this sort would require a massive crossbeam, greatly compounding operational problems of deployment to the extent that it may not be possible to activate the system within the defensive reaction window-of-time needed to stop a speeding vehicle.⁷⁷

Even if a sufficiently strong and maneuverable barrier could be erected, it was pointed out that terrorists would respond by simply changing the nature of their attack. In this respect, FBI ordnance experts for example maintain that if an enhanced ammonium nitrate/compressed gas cylinder-type device was used, a car bomb attack mounted from Pennsylvania Avenue would be capable of causing considerable damage to the White House, particularly the front of the building where at least some 200 employees work. Officials have also speculated that terrorists may attempt to conceal larger bombs on board tour buses which would be parked nearby in the vicinity of Lafayette Park and then detonated using short-fuse timers. These experts argue that the combined over pressure and shock velocity from a vehicle delivery system of this sort could, potentially, be as great as that generated by a standard truck bomb.⁷⁸

The measured opinion of the law enforcement and security community is thus that barrier systems will only work if they are permanently staffed by armed guards prepared to open fire against any suspect vehicle. Such a militarized option is not possible for a democratic country such as the U.S. The FBI argues this effectively means that every time a credible threat to the White House was made, Pennsylvania Avenue would have to be closed down and cleared out, resulting in considerably more chaos and disruption than is engendered by its

⁷⁷Discussion with FBI officers, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000. See also, Ellis, *Police Tactics and Planning for Vehicular Bombing*, p.203.

⁷⁸Discussion with FBI officers, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000.

permanent closure. In fact, FBI agents responsible for counterterrorism in the Washington, D.C. area believe that on the basis of the three to four daily terrorist warnings they currently receive, such a scenario could be expected to eventuate at least once every month. As one FBI agent, responsible for counterterrorist planning and operations in the city observed: "Ninety to 95 per cent of the complaints today [about the closure] has to do with peoples' increased commutes. What is a human life worth to make someone's commute easier?"⁷⁹

⁷⁹Ibid.

4. A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SECURITY MEASURES IN FORCE IN FOREIGN CAPITAL CITIES

Do security measures adopted overseas have any relevance for the U.S. in relation to possible contingencies against truck bomb attacks? Three capital cities that have avoided closing down major thoroughfares and avenues despite being confronted with serious campaigns of terrorism are London, Paris and Colombo, Sri Lanka. However, in each of these cases, the contingencies that have been instituted reflect specific contextual circumstances and situations that, we discovered in the course of our research, largely do not apply to the Washington, D.C. area. Indeed, to at least some American officials responsible for security in Washington, D.C., the inapplicability of foreign models is indicative of the problematic nature of re-opening Pennsylvania Avenue in general. For these officials, as the previous section discussed, any moves to revisit the 1995 closure decision are neither necessary nor particularly judicious. Nonetheless, the situation in a select sample of foreign capitals is perhaps worth briefly reviewing if only for the light that they shed on the security problems faced by other countries confronted with terrorist threats and how they have coped and addressed them.

LONDON

During the first half of the 1990s, London was subjected to a particularly intensive campaign of Provisional IRA (PIRA) terrorism. Carried out under the auspices of that organization's "England Department," the most serious incidents included attacks against the Prime Minister's official residence at Number 10 Downing Street in 1991 and 1992. The first occurred in February 1991, at the height of the Persian Gulf War, when PIRA managed to launch several remote control mortars from a van parked on Horse Guards Parade, into the garden behind the executive building, shattering the windows in the room where 15 ministers and officials of the (Gulf) War Cabinet were then meeting.

Four people were injured in the attack.⁸⁰ The second incident took place a little under a year later in February 1992 when a PIRA incendiary device exploded less than 300 meters from Downing Street, though this time little damage was sustained as the surrounding area had already been evacuated following a telephone warning.⁸¹

There have also been two massive truck bombings in the heart of the City's financial district—St Mary's Axe in 1992 and Bishop's Gate in 1993—that are of relevance. The St Mary's Axe blast was described "as the most powerful explosion in London since World War II," when a bomb constructed of up to a ton of fertilizer (ammonium nitrate) exploded outside the Baltic Exchange building in the heart of the city's financial center, killing three persons, wounding 90 others, and leaving a 12-foot wide crater and causing \$1.25 billion in damage.⁸² Exactly a year later, a similar bomb devastated the nearby Bishops Gate district, killing one person and injuring more than 40 others. Initial estimates put the damage at \$1.5 billion.⁸³ These two attacks devastated the heart of London's financial district and were intentionally designed to severely undermine London's prestige as a world financial center.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Stewart Tendler, "A crude and lethal weapon to thwart the security forces," *The Times* (London), February 8, 1991; and, Will Bennett "Simple bombs improved but lack accuracy," *Independent* (London), February 8, 1991.

⁸¹For further details see J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), p.786; and John Gearson and Lawrence Freedman, "Financial Centres and the Terrorism Threat: The Case of the IRA's British Mainland Campaign," paper delivered before the RAND/Oklahoma "Terrorism and Beyond: The 21st Century" International Conference, Oklahoma City, 17-19 April 2000, pp. 10 & 12.

⁸²William E. Schmidt, "One Dead, 40 Hurt as Blast Rips Central London," *New York Times*, 25 April 1993. See also, William E. Schmidt, "With London Still in Bomb Shock, Major Appoints His New Cabinet," *New York Times*, 12 April 1992; "Delays Seen in London," *New York Times*, 13 April 1992; Peter Rodgers, "City bomb claims may reach flbn," *The Independent* (London), 14 April 1992; and David Connett, "IRA City bomb was fertilizer," *The Independent* (London), 28 May 1992.

⁸³Schmidt, "One Dead, 40 Hurt as Blast Rips Central London," 25 April 1993; and Richard W. Stevenson, "I.R.A. Says It Placed Fatal Bomb; London Markets Rush to Reopen," *New York Times*, 26 April 1993.

⁸⁴See, for instance, Cathy Milton, Jimmy Burns and Richard Lapper, "Shattered City Strives for Business as Usual," *The Financial Times*

The threat of future, repeated attacks and of an intensified campaign of sabotage directed against Britain's economic nerve center, was taken very seriously. Accordingly, in response to these assaults, a so-called "Traffic Management Scheme" (TMS) was instituted in 1993 that has since monitored all traffic entering or leaving the square mile vicinity of the inner City of London. Unofficially known as the "ring of steel," the now-routine operation involves police cordons, random vehicular checks, mobile "rolling road blocks" and high definition closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras positioned along critical streets and at key intersections. Every car, truck or van that enters the City has its license plate fed immediately into a centralized database, where it is automatically traced and cross-referenced with police and Department of Transport (DoT) national vehicular registration records. In addition, an advanced surveillance network known as Mandrake was introduced in 1998 and is used to rapidly identify the faces of known or suspected terrorists by matching the physical facial features of pedestrians with criminal photographs stored in computerized police information banks.⁸⁵

The institution of this invasive monitoring system has allowed the British authorities to maintain a largely unrestricted traffic flow in the heart of London. Although Downing Street, where the Prime Minister's official residence is located, itself is closed to ordinary traffic and restrictions to traffic have been introduced on the roundabout system immediately outside Buckingham Palace closing access to the roadway around the historic fountain in front, neither street represents a major thoroughfare in terms of vehicular volume to the extent that Pennsylvania Avenue does. Indeed, more important London routes such as Whitehall, Pall Mall, Victoria Embankment and Westminster Avenue remain open and, despite passing directly in front of buildings that symbolize the seat of British power and government (e.g., the

(London), April 13, 1992; and "Banks Take Brunt of Bishopsgate Bomb," *The Daily Telegraph* (London), April 26, 1993.

⁸⁵Gearson and Freedman, "Financial Centres and the Terrorism Threat: The Case of the IRA's British Mainland Campaign," 21, 25; James Hardy, "City Gets Cameras that Can Spot Terrorists," *The Sunday Telegraph* (London), August 2, 1998.

Parliament Buildings and Big Ben, the Ministry of Defence, and Foreign Ministry) or of Britain's rich historical heritage (e.g., Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral), no moves have ever been made to pedestrianize them or otherwise restrict vehicular traffic or access. Just as critically from a public management and policy viewpoint, the "ring of steel" has become a more or less an integral part of daily London life and is now largely accepted by commuters, business groups and motoring organizations.

This being said, it is unlikely that a scheme such as the TMS would either work in Washington, D.C., much less be accepted in the U.S. Unlike the District of Columbia, the City of London exists and functions in a very small, geographically limited, self-contained area, which makes perimeter surveillance both feasible and reasonably secure. Enacting similar measures around the District of Columbia in its entirety would pose a challenging, if not, overwhelming task that could never hope to achieve the same degree of security confidence. The City of London is also very thinly populated in terms of permanent residents, which has undoubtedly helped to avail public acceptance of the TMS. Automated surveillance systems of this sort would almost certainly be rejected in the District of Columbia, given the far greater number of people that actually live in the city's environs. In addition, it is worth noting that, in many respects, the perceived threat of truck bombs is probably not as great in Britain as it is in the U.S. given PIRA's track-record of targeting, generally with prior warning, commercial buildings at night or on the weekends that are therefore mostly empty of their occupants. This has, arguably, allowed British government and security officials to accept a higher threshold of potential risk than their counterparts in the U.S., where, thanks to events such as the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings—both of which occurred during working hours on a Friday afternoon and a Thursday morning respectively—concern over mass civilian attacks remains paramount. Finally, unlike the U.S., Britain because of its smaller population has a national vehicle registration system which facilitates immediate information retrieval from one centralized database. In the U.S., of course, there is no national department of motor vehicle (DMV)

registration like in Britain: instead each state has its own DMV which, given the large number of vehicles registered in the U.S., would render expeditious identification of ownership and registration, problematical at best.

PARIS

Contingencies in Paris are essentially defined by the *Vigipirate* Plan, which was introduced following a wave of bombings that rocked the country in 1995. Between July and October, terrorists belonging to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), using bombs fashioned with four-inch nails wrapped around camping style cooking-gas canisters, killed eight persons and wounded more than 180 others. The targets were almost invariably public gathering places and were therefore calculated by the perpetrators to inflict wanton harm on ordinary bystanders and passersby. They included the Paris metro (subway), popular tourist attractions, sidewalk cafes, schools, etc. Under the counterterrorist plan, which was implemented immediately in response to the first attacks, some 32,000 soldiers, police and customs officials were mobilized, who in turn checked the identities and documents of nearly three million persons—of whom 70,000 were detained for further questioning.⁸⁶

Vigipirate essentially involved a seven-tiered strategy that is designed to be deliberately flexible, allowing countermeasures to be upgraded or downgraded according to the situation at hand and current, ongoing, assessment of the terrorist threat. The plan is, thus, neither based on worst case scenarios, nor did it proceed from a presumed assumption that, once instituted, contingencies cannot be rolled back or scaled down. Three areas are emphasized as having particular importance: protection of government buildings; securing soft civilian

⁸⁶Ben Macintyre, "French police seize bombs and rifles in Paris dawn raids," *Times* (London), February 20, 1996. See also, "St Michel Bomb: Islamist Connection 'Most Likely'," *Le Figaro* (Paris), July 27, 1995; Med Berkhan, "Islamists: The Division of Europe," *Le Point* (Paris), September 2, 1995; and, Ben Macintyre, "Parisians face up to security failure," *Times* (London), October 19, 1995.

targets such as schools and libraries; and, mitigating the potential threat of truck bombs.⁸⁷

As with the City of London, these objectives have been accomplished without closing down or sealing off major roads and thoroughfares in Paris, including those immediately adjacent to the presidential residence. According to senior French counterterrorism intelligence officials interviewed as part of this project, two elements have been critical in the plan's success to date: thorough penetration of GIA cells operating in France, which represent the preeminent, current terrorist threat; and greatly reducing truck traffic within Paris' inner precincts by maintaining a de-facto *cordon sanitaire* around the city's outer ring road.⁸⁸

Again, however, it is doubtful whether these contingencies could translate easily to a Washington, D.C., much less a wider American context. Restricting vehicular traffic from the confines of the District of Columbia would not be commercially possible given the number of businesses and commercial outlets that are located in the downtown area. Equally, while proactive intelligence gathering must be viewed as a critical component of any counterterrorism program, it has been facilitated by the fact that French security officials are essentially confronting a known and mostly single adversarial quantity—the GIA. This does not apply to the U.S., where potential threats could conceivably emanate from a whole range of anti-government extremists, both domestic and foreign-based. Finally, American counterterrorism officials have been quick to point out, that although the street beside the French presidential palace does indeed remain open to traffic without restriction, the building, itself is protected by a high

⁸⁷Discussions with senior French counter-terrorism officials, Paris, April 28, 2000. See also "Plan Vigipirate et appel a la vigilance," *Societe* (Paris), December 6, 1996, accessed via <http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/1996>; Adam Sage and Francois Raitberger, "France Acts to Combat Bombers," *The Australian* (Brisbane), September 12, 1995; and "France Relaxes Anti-Terror Plan but Keeps Frontier Controls," *Agence France-Presse*, January 11, 1996.

⁸⁸Discussions with senior French counter-terrorism officials, Paris, April 28, 2000.

perimeter wall and a considerably distant set-back. It is also not open to the public.⁸⁹

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

In common with London and Paris, Colombo has also avoided implementing permanent road closures around major executive and government buildings. This, despite being confronted by what is arguably the world's most proficient and lethal terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Repeated assassination attempts, including one that nearly claimed the life of the current president at an election rally in December 1999, have led to the institution of a range of security measures around Temple Trees, Colombo's equivalent to the White House. Nonetheless, with the exception of the street that passes directly opposite the presidential residence—which, since 1996, has been reduced to a single lane and is completely closed to all vehicular traffic at sunset—no major or permanent route restrictions have been implemented in the building's vicinity.⁹⁰

It is important to note, however, that this has only been achieved at the expense of a heavily fortified and military presence, both within the presidential residence itself as well as more generally throughout Colombo. Bunkers, complete with sandbags and wire mesh and an array of automatic and heavy weapons, have been built within the Temple Trees perimeter and all approaches to the area are strictly controlled by static and mobile military checkpoints. Moreover, while vehicles can still access the roads that surround Temple Trees, the routes themselves have been significantly modified with speed humps, zigzag barriers, wrought iron barricades and surface girders constructed from rail tracks that have been cemented into the roadbed.⁹¹

These types of visible and militarized countermeasures obviously have little relevance for an open society (and a country not presently

⁸⁹Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000.

⁹⁰Written correspondence with a senior Sri Lankan security expert, May 26, 2000.

⁹¹Ibid.

at war) such as the U.S. and certainly do not offer a viable alternative to the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue. Quite apart from being at odds with the constitutional and democratic norms that underscore American civil governance, military bunkers and checkpoints would largely destroy the White House's reputation as an unrestricted domestic and international tourist attraction. This latter consideration alone ensures that the nature, type and extent of security planning in Washington, D.C. will be vastly different from that which prevails in Colombo—a city that gives little, if any import to maintaining the presidential residence as a publicly accessible venue.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The White House represents one of America's most recognizable symbols of government, democracy and freedom—one deserving and requiring the utmost protection and security. It is essential, however, that the Executive Mansion's defensive arrangements both reflect the openness and vitality that are the defining characteristics of the U.S. and project an image of strength and confidence consonant with the leader of the free world and the globe's only superpower. The security architecture around the White House is thus a critical element of the building's symbolic function. By flinching in the face of terrorism and imposing demonstrably disruptive protective measures, the U.S. risks presenting an undesirable and unwanted image. The fundamental challenge therefore is how to achieve an equitable balance between these equally critical requirements, while simultaneously minimizing public disruption and inconvenience.

This is a highly complex and even contentious issue: but one that merits the full and frank "national conversation" advocated by Senator Moynihan. It is a dialogue that should involve both input from the diverse constituencies concerned about security along Pennsylvania Avenue and an airing of views and concerns that reach outside the narrow circle of officials specifically charged with ensuring the security of the White House and the safety of its residents, staff and visitors. Just as important, it will require judicious public explanation, particularly if the general populace is expected to understand and support the security measures that are ultimately decided upon. In retrospect, this appears to have been one of the main problems with the decision-making process that surrounded the 1995 closure of Pennsylvania Avenue, which went well beyond public statements suggesting the move was driven exclusively to assure the safety of the President and his family from cataclysmic truck bomb attacks. Indeed, during the course of our research, it became apparent that protection of the White House's facade from even minimal or cosmetic damage were as much a factor in the

decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue as ensuring the safety of the president and his family.

Several pressing and inter-related areas need also to be addressed in any national conversation regarding the future of Pennsylvania Avenue.

First, there needs to be a comprehensive examination of whether an 800 foot setback both from the White House's South Portico to E Street on the north side of the Ellipse and from the front of the White House, across Pennsylvania Avenue, to the northern curb of Lafayette Park on H Street is, in fact, the minimum distance required to sufficiently protect the Executive Mansion. Such an assessment should clearly explicate—and justify—the context within which stand-off determinations are gauged, particularly with regard to questions over acceptable and unacceptable levels of building damage.

Second, consideration needs to be given to the various proposals now emerging from designers, architects and transportation engineers exploring the possibilities of key modifications along Pennsylvania Avenue that would open the street to traffic, but still ensure an appropriate level of security. These schemes should not be blindly dismissed for the sake of maintaining complete control over that section of the street or in order to preserve the current status quo simply because any alternative is either too risky or too complicated to contemplate. Full discussion should therefore be encouraged to examine their utility. If they then are found wanting, a statement of explanation and justification ought to be provided by the appropriate authority. In the same vein, suggestions that have been made to fortify the White House and its surrounding grounds should be assessed and weighed in light of legitimate security, symbolic and access considerations. Finally, Secret Service, Treasury and law enforcement concerns over reopening Pennsylvania Avenue need to be clearly explained—possibly in the context of a public hearing in Congress—if only to elucidate more clearly the reasoning behind their insistence that the roadway should remain closed and to better convey that logic to the American public.

Finally, terrorist threat and response environments should not be considered as either static or "zero sum" in nature. Terrorist capabilities improve; aims and motivations of perpetrators change; tactics and weapons evolve; and, terrorism itself has arguably undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years, becoming more deadly, destructive and unpredictable than was previously the case. By the same token, such evolution and development does not occur in a vacuum and applies equally to government, law enforcement and intelligence capabilities as well. In this respect, response capabilities improve, physical security technologies advance and new countermeasures emerge capable of addressing a range of potential terrorist attack contingencies. Indeed, given the attention, budgets and personnel devoted to counterterrorism since the Oklahoma City bombing, the U.S. is arguably far better prepared to address the threat of terrorism than ever before—and particularly since the 1994/95 time frame when the existing security procedures along Pennsylvania Avenue were put into place. There is no reason to assume that future technological advances will not continue to enhance preventive and preemptive measures. It would thus seem appropriate to hold in abeyance any solution that seeks to impose the permanent closure of Pennsylvania Avenue. Not only would such a decision prove difficult, if not impossible, to ever reverse once permanently adopted, but it also ignores the inherently dynamic nature of counterterrorism technologies and operations and the potential for security advances and breakthroughs that may yet occur. Within this context, it should perhaps be mandated that the security arrangements around the White House and other federal landmarks be reviewed and assessed on some regular basis by a standing advisory commission in addition to whatever internal, inter-governmental process might exist. Such an arrangement would provide a mechanism for validating and substantiating the continuation of existing practices while ensuring enough flexibility for the introduction of suitable adjustments as and when necessary.

The basic security architecture in and around the White House remained essentially unchanged for nearly two hundred years. It is thus only in the past few years that the profound changes in force on

Pennsylvania Avenue today were put into effect. To those involved in the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue in 1995 the risks of a truck bomb being detonated outside the White House outweighed the Jeffersonian symbolism of an open Pennsylvania Avenue. Without ongoing review and reassessment we cannot be sure that it remains the most appropriate policy.

A. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. *What were the primary factors that were considered in the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue?*

Probes:

- What was the purpose of closing down Pennsylvania Avenue?
- What were the original decision-making processes?
 - Have these processes changed since the original decision was taken?
- Who were the decision-makers?
 - Are these decision-makers still in place?
- What groups were consulted and why?

2. *Having taken the decision to close down Pennsylvania Avenue, was any thought given to assessing how long the Ave. should stay closed?*

Probes (if yes):

- What factors were considered?
- Are these factors still relevant to conditions and threat levels as they exist today?
- Has there, in fact, been a re-examination of the original decision?
- (Only if not answered) Has there been any serious assessment of whether the decision to close Penn. Ave. has created different threats to the White House (such as mortar attacks from roof tops or contiguous access roads)?

Probes (if no):

- Why was there no consideration of this?
- Has any thought recently been given to creating a reassessment process?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why?

3. *In looking to the future, have any alternatives been examined other than the complete closure of Pennsylvania Avenue?*

Probes (if yes):

- What are the alternatives?
- Who evaluates these alternatives and their applicability?
- Can these alternatives be reasonably implemented in terms of cost and potential disruption?
- Were any public/interest groups consulted in developing and assessing these alternatives?

Probes (if no):

- Why have other alternatives not been considered?

4. *Broadening the focus from the White House to external physical security in general, have the responses of other major capital cities faced with serious terrorist threats been examined?*

Probes (if yes):

- Are these responses applicable to Washington DC?
- (If applicable) Have any of the lessons from other major cities been incorporated into physical counter-terrorist planning?

Probes (if no):

- Why have the experiences of other major capital cities not been considered?

5. *In terms of threat perception, what is the greatest type of danger posed by terrorists in Washington DC today?*

Probes:

- How are threat assessments made (current threat perceptions/worst case scenarios)?
- Is the terrorist threat confronting Washington DC today the same

as it was since the decision was taken to close down Penn.
Ave.

- (If no):
 - Has it increased or decreased?
 - Has it changed in terms of level, type or both?
 - How does the continued closure of Pennsylvania Avenue address this threat?
 - How do physical security measures incorporated at other Federal buildings address this threat?

B. MAJOR SECURITY BREACHES PRIOR TO THE INSTITUTION OF THE 1994 WHITE HOUSE SECURITY REVIEW

FEBRUARY 17, 1974: HELICOPTER ASSAULT ON WHITE HOUSE

On the night of February 17, 1974, Pfc. Robert K. Preston, an Army helicopter mechanic at Fort Meade, Maryland, stole a helicopter from the army base and flew it toward the White House Complex. After receiving a complaint from a citizen that Preston had landed briefly in a trailer park near Jessup, Maryland before taking off again, Maryland State Police scrambled two police helicopters in pursuit of the stolen chopper. Preston flew the helicopter down the Baltimore-Washington Parkway towards downtown Washington, D.C., buzzing traffic along the parkway.⁹² He passed over the Executive Mansion and hovered over the South Lawn, briefly touching down before flying toward the Washington Monument. Due to the fact that the EPS did not know who was piloting the aircraft and was unaware that it had been stolen from Fort Meade, there was no attempt made to shoot it down. At the monument grounds, Preston hovered for five minutes before flying across to the White House, almost ramming one of the Maryland state helicopters that had been pursuing him.

Meanwhile, the Executive Protection Service had been alerted to Preston entering restricted airspace and turned on the White House floodlights.⁹³ As the helicopter made its second pass of the White House grounds, EPS agents opened fire on the helicopter, blasting it with shotgun and submachine-gun fire and forcing the helicopter down. Preston was immediately subdued by EPS and Metropolitan police officers; he suffered superficial shotgun wounds.⁹⁴ Preston would later be

⁹²Richard L. Madden, "Soldier Lands Helicopter On White House Lawn," *The New York Times*, February 18, 1974, pp. 1 & 50.

⁹³U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review*, p. 99.

⁹⁴Madden, "Soldier Lands Helicopter On White House Lawn," p. 50.

sentenced by a court martial to a year of hard labor and fined \$2,400; his private single-engine pilot's license was also revoked by the FAA.⁹⁵

THE DECEMBER 25, 1974 MARSHALL FIELDS GATE CRASHING INCIDENT

On Christmas Day, Marshall Fields, dressed like an Arab and claiming to be carrying explosives, crashed his Chevrolet Caprice through the northwest gate of the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. The gate was heavily damaged and failed to disable the car. After driving up to within 10 feet of the White House North Portico, Fields got out of the car with what appeared to be explosives attached to his body. He removed black satchels from the car and placed them in front of him as he stood for the next four hours in front the West Wing of the White House. Fields also had in his hands what appeared to be wires for the explosives he was allegedly carrying. According to the EPS, Fields was not "neutralized" because the security forces believed Fields was carrying explosives and the President was not in the White House at the time. Mr. Fields' only request was to talk to the Pakistani Ambassador; he demanded that his request be played over the Howard University radio station. After hearing that the request was announced on the radio station, Fields surrendered.⁹⁶ Security officials quickly apprehended him and bomb squad and fire officials moved in to remove the "explosives", which, after examination, turned out to be flares.⁹⁷ Fields was sentenced to eighteen months in jail for destruction of property.⁹⁸

THE SEPTEMBER 12, 1994 PLANE CRASH ON THE WHITE HOUSE SOUTH LAWN

Shortly before midnight on the evening of September 11, 1994, Frank Eugene Corder stole an airplane from Aldino Airport in Churchville, Maryland, and flew it toward Washington, D.C.. The airplane was first

⁹⁵Associated Press, "Soldier Gets Year Term for Helicopter Incident," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1974, p. 10; UPI, "Pilot's License Revoked," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1974, p. 34.

⁹⁶Philip Shabecoff, "Intruder in Car Smashes White House Gate," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1974, pp. 1 & 24.

⁹⁷U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review*, p. 93.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 50.

detected at 1:06 PM by FAA radar at Baltimore/Washington International Airport. At 1:44 PM, the control tower at Reagan National Airport picked up the radar signal from Corder's airplane, which was now 6.5 miles north of the White House flying at an altitude of 2700 feet. Over the next three minutes, the airplane descended approximately 1000 feet and turned directly south. It flew over Washington Circle and entered the protected airspace over the White House known as P-56. This no-fly zone extends from the White House to the Mall and from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, and can only be entered by authorized aircraft. The airplane then banked left in a U-turn near the Washington Monument and headed straight towards the Executive Mansion. Descending rapidly, the plane passed over the Ellipse and crashed onto the White House lawn at approximately 1:49 AM. The plane skidded across the lawn, struck a tree just west of the South Portico and crashed into the southwest corner of the Executive Mansion below the President's bedroom.⁹⁹

THE OCTOBER 29, 1994 WHITE HOUSE SHOOTING

On October 29, 1994, Francisco Martin Duran walked in front of the White House, pulled out an SKS semi-automatic rifle from under his trench coat and began firing at the north face of the White House. After the initial burst of gunfire, he ran from east to west toward the Treasury Building, continuing to fire occasionally through the fence. When Duran paused to reload, he was tackled by a tourist and subdued with the help of two other citizens, who held Duran until the Secret Service Uniform Division could arrive. In total, Duran was able to fire at least 29 rounds before being subdued; eleven of these rounds struck the White House façade on the North Side and one bullet penetrated a window in the Press Briefing Room in the West Wing.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review*, " pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

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